The Massachusetts Legislature has heard the concerns of families and medical professionals across the Commonwealth and has put forth a comprehensive piece of legislation to address the looming health care crisis that is Alzheimer’s disease.

The Mass Alzheimer’s and Dementia Act (H.4116) would help tens of thousands of families grappling with Alzheimer’s and dementia while ensuring the Commonwealth is better prepared to handle the most under-recognized threat to public health in the 21st century.

What’s in the Bill?

> **A Comprehensive State Plan:**
There are more than 120,000 people in our state with Alzheimer’s disease supported by 300,000 family caregivers, and that number is growing. On the current trajectory, Massachusetts will see a 25 percent increase in the number of people with Alzheimer’s disease over the next decade, with an estimated 150,000 people having Alzheimer’s by 2025. Alzheimer’s disease is the most expensive disease in America; costing the country $259 billion dollars a year. Medicare and Medicaid spent over $175 billion dollars dealing with impact of the disease last year alone. This bill would ensure the creation of an integrated state plan to overcome Alzheimer’s disease within the Executive Office of Elder Affairs while also establishing a permanent advisory council to coordinate government efforts and ensure that appropriate resources are maximized and leveraged.

> **Provider Education, Training & Accountability:**
Today, at least 50% of Americans with Alzheimer’s disease are not diagnosed, and of those diagnosed, less than half are told of their diagnosis, creating an enormous obstacle for care of people with this disease. This is a critical problem because early diagnosis can help the person with Alzheimer’s and their caregivers receive appropriate treatment and support, helping them live a safer, more satisfying life and potentially slowing disease progression. Healthcare providers are in a unique position to identify early warning signs of Alzheimer’s and dementia. These professionals must have the skills to diagnose, treat and provide quality care to dementia patients. This bill would require that curriculum content about Alzheimer’s and related dementias be incorporated into continuing medical education programs that are required for the granting or renewal of licensure for physicians, physician assistants, registered nurses, and licensed nurse practitioners.
> Alzheimer’s and Dementia in the Acute Care Setting:
People with Alzheimer’s and related dementias often fare poorly in the acute care setting. According to an analysis by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Massachusetts has the sixth highest rate of hospital readmissions for patients with Alzheimer’s or related dementias. As a result of previous legislation and coordinated efforts by state government, hospitals, various providers and the Alzheimer’s Association, a comprehensive set of recommendations were created to significantly improve care for patients with dementia who are hospitalized. This bill would both improve the patient and caregiver experience in the acute care setting and improve cost effectiveness and quality of care by requiring all Massachusetts hospitals to implement an operational plan for the recognition and management of patients with dementia or delirium in acute-care settings accountable to the Department of Public Health.

> Protection from Abuse and Exploitation:
Elders with Alzheimer’s and dementia are at greater risk for neglect and abuse—financial, physical and emotional. This bill would establish regulations for minimum-training standards for elder protective services social workers. The bill extends training to these workers who are on the frontline of protecting the most vulnerable elders. This legislation is the result of recommendations from the Elder Protective Services Special Commission Report, which identified a number of ways to improve elder protective services in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts has been a national leader in health care. We must continue to lead the way in all aspects of the sector. Alzheimer’s is the single largest, looming, unaddressed public health threat facing the nation and we must remain determined to provide quality care and support to every family across the Commonwealth.

Please support the Massachusetts Alzheimer’s & Dementia Act (H.4116)!

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